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Admiral Kingsmill and the Early Years of the Royal Canadian Navy

Part II

Roger Sarty

Following are the second and third documents in a series assembled to support the creation of a plaque in honour of Admiral Kingsmill by the Ontario Heritage Trust. The plaque is located at his burial place, Emmanuel Anglican Church Cemetery, Portland Ontario, near the location of Kingsmill's summer home on Grindstone Island, and was unveiled in a ceremony on 15 May 2010.

Document 2

Kingsmill's recommendations for development of the Canadian Navy, 1911

Director of the Naval Service, "Memorandum for the Deputy Minister," 9 October 1911 (National Defence Headquarters, Directorate of History and Heritage, G.J. Desbarats papers, folder "A")

Editor's note: This is Kingsmill's professional advice to the new Conservative government that came to power after the defeat of the Laurier government in the federal election of September 1911. It shows in detail his vision for the new navy eighteen months after the proclamation of the Naval Service Act on 4 May 1910. The development of the service had in fact been almost completely stalled since late 1910 when the Laurier government began to hesitate in the face of opposition, especially among French Canadians in Quebec, the Liberal party's power base. One can sense Kingsmill's impatience, especially in his recommendation that the training program should be expanded and accelerated by acquiring the obsolescent battleship HMS Empress of India as an additional training platform. She was one of the "Royal Sovereign" class built as a result of the Naval Defence Act of 1889 that had mandated expansion and modernization of the British fleet to compete with the growing naval strength of France and Russia, then the most likely enemies of the Empire. Kingsmill's emphasis on training facilities, like the detailed recommendations for the improvement of base facilities, show a professional's determination that the new service should have the infrastructure necessary to sustain effective ongoing operations and as a foundation for future development. Also note his warning that naval technology was changing so rapidly that the warship designs being considered for the new fleet should be updated.

The fate of Kingsmill's recommendations was anticipated by a short handwritten minute dated 28 October 1911 by the deputy minister, G. J. Desbarats, on the first page, "Submitted as a recital of facts, and without endorsing the incidental recommendations." A seasoned bureaucrat attuned to the direction of political winds, Desbarats well understood the Conservatives' opposition to the Laurier naval project. He was not about to immerse himself or the department in political controversy by endorsing the naval staff's professional advice. Desbarats was right to be cautious.

The new government soon slashed the naval budget in half, to \$1,660,000, and called a halt to all development while they considered means by which the Laurier program could be replaced by one for a more modest and less controversial force.

.....

Memorandum for the Deputy Minister.

With the advent of a Minister who is not conversant with Naval matters, nor with the requirements of the Naval Service, it appears desirable to supply information on these points; I therefore forward herewith a few remarks which will tend to enlighten him with regard to immediate requirements with a view to discussion at an early date on the points raised.

[signed] C.E. Kingsmill
Rear Admiral.

Director of the Naval Service.

Ottawa, October 9th, 1911.

I. Ship Construction

.....

The programme of a new construction adopted by the late Government consists of :-

4 Cruisers of the improved "Bristol" type.
6 improved "River Class" Destroyers.

Whilst this programme does not appear an ambitious one, yet it meets present

Admiral Sir Charles Edmund Kingsmill

requirements from the fact that Ships of this type do not require very large complements, and we are in a position to train sufficient men to form part of their crew, and will not require to obtain the loan of such large numbers of officers and men from the Imperial Government as would be necessary if large Armoured Cruisers were included in the programme. The Admiralty find difficulty in keeping their ships fully manned, and are thus not in a position to spare large numbers for the Dominion Navies.

Tenders were called for and have been received by the Government for the construction of these vessels in Canada; whilst it may be desirable to encourage a Firm or Firms to establish Shipyards in Canada, the interest and efficiency of the Naval Service would be better served if some portion of the Ships, one or two of the Cruisers, and two Destroyers, were constructed in England, orders being placed without delay. We should thus be able to obtain delivery of one Destroyer within a year and one Cruiser and a second Destroyer within 18 months; by that time a sufficient number of men will have been trained to form the nucleus of the crews and training will be more efficiently and expeditiously carried out with the advent of modern Ships. In the mean time a Shipyard can be established in Canada and the remainder of the ships constructed in this Yard; the whole of the Programme would thus be completed in four years instead of in six years as at present arranged. Owing to the rapidity with which designs change it is anticipated that, if it takes six years to complete the programme, the Ships will be out of date before they are completed.

Even in the short period which has elapsed since the present designs were adopted, the typical destroyers have increased in displacement and the machinery arrangement has been re-designed, which may make it desirable to negotiate with the firm who undertakes the work for an improved destroyer.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) PA 108013



II. Personnel.

MINIMUM TIME NECESSARY FOR THE TRAINING OF SEAMEN.

Boy in training ship	2 years
Able Seaman	2 years
Seaman Gunner or Torpedo Man	1 year
Gunlayer	<u>1 year</u>
Total	6 years
Stoker, 2nd Class, in training ship	1 year
Stoker, 1st Class	<u>2 years</u>
Total	3 years

Owing to the length of time which it takes to train a Seaman (as above), it is necessary that recruiting should be proceeded with as expeditiously as possible. At present recruits are trained in "NIOBE" and "RAINBOW", Cruisers purchased from the Imperial Government for that purpose; the accommodations, however, in those Ships is limited, there being only room for approximately 250 recruits; it is therefore urgent to make arrangements for further accommodation, and this can be done either by building permanent Barracks on shore, or by

having a permanent floating barracks; owing to the time which must elapse to complete a building ashore, it is advisable to adopt the latter plan, and the Admiralty are willing to provide, at breaking up price (about \$160,000) the "Empress of India", an obsolete battleship of 14,150 tons; this Ship would require an expenditure of about \$80,000 to fit her for service for which she is required. This ship would have a life of 20 years at least, and, at the end of that period, her value for breaking up purposes would not have materially depreciated.

The present system of recruiting, under which Postmasters act as Recruiting Officers, was only intended as a temporary measure, and, whilst it is proposed to continue the system, it is necessary to supplement it by appointing proper Recruiting Officers. The number of desertions from the Ships tends to show that we are not obtaining the class of men we require; mostly they are recruited from the Towns, have no knowledge of the life they are undertaking, and, not finding it to their liking, they desert. With proper Recruiting Officers visiting the towns and villages around the sea coasts, it is anticipated that we shall obtain recruits from the fishing population, men and boys accustomed to a seafaring life. The Recruiting Officers should be supplied with lantern and slides depicting life in the Navy; an entertainment of this kind would materially assist in recruiting.

It would also be advantageous if arrangements were made to acquire the use of West's "Our Navy" films, which could be hired out to the Proprietors of Cinematograph entertainments in various Towns to educate the lay mind in Naval matters.

It is essential that the Pension scheme shall be decided without delay in order that the full advantages of the Naval Service may be made known. Proposed schemes have been prepared and submitted for consideration.



George J. Desbarats

The rates of pay provided do not compare favourably with shore rates, and, although this does not affect the younger men who are provided with food, clothing and lodging and who have no outside expenses, there is not doubt that complaints will arise as they arrive at marriageable age and find that their pay does not admit of matrimony; many complaints have already been received with respect to this from the Pensioners and Fleet Reserve men who were recruited in England. To increase the pay all round, and bring it up to the shore rates, is out of the question, and it is proposed therefore to institute a "married allowance" to be provided under regulations to a fixed proportion of the various ratings; this will place the Naval Service on the same footing as the Permanent Militia. A proposed scheme has been prepared and submitted for consideration.

With the acquisition of a permanent Training Establishment and a Training

Cruiser, the establishment of a Naval Reserve must be seriously considered. It is not proposed to establish a large reserve, and there should be no difficulty in enrolling sufficient men who have seafaring experience, and who would be glad to undertake training in the winter months. Regulations for a Naval Reserve have already been prepared and submitted for consideration.

III. BUILDINGS

Naval College

Whilst the present College is sufficient for immediate requirements, it is essential to look to the future, when it is at once apparent that the present accommodation will be quite insufficient to meet requirements in a very few years.

The course of training necessitates that a certain number of Officers shall return to College after serving a certain time at sea, and it is necessary at once to think of providing the necessary accommodation.

The present College cannot possibly accommodate more than 45 cadets, and this is the number fixed for the requirements of the Naval Service; it would, however, be advantageous if a larger number of Cadets could be entered, in order that the best might be selected for the Naval Service and thus keep a higher standard; as it becomes more widely known what an excellent education is obtainable at the College, it is anticipated that there will be no lack of candidates. An institution such as R.M.C. Kingston, only on Naval lines, would be of great value to the country.

It is, however, necessary to introduce an allowance for Travelling expenses of the Cadets since the high cost of travelling practically eliminates candidates from the West and Central Provinces; the arrangements proposed have already been submitted for consideration.

It will be seen from the foregoing that it is necessary to at once consider the question of the construction of a new College Building, surrounded by recreation grounds and the necessary buildings and workshops, incidental to the course of training which is carried out.

III. DRILL SHED & TRAINING BATTERY

These are required in connection with the training of recruits; a certain portion of Gunnery Training can be carried out in the Training Establishments, but it is necessary to provide these buildings on shore at an early date.

The question of the gun battery requires very early consideration. Recruits are, at present, being trained with obsolescent guns, which in the early stages of training is immaterial.

Two years from the present time however, it will be necessary for these recruits to commence more advanced training with guns and appliances similar to those they will find in the ships about to be built.

The necessary guns and mountings will have to be manufactured in England and the absolute minimum time for this is 12 months, their dispatch to Canada and erection would entail a further 6 months.

Consequently a decision as to the locality for its erection should not be now long deferred.

A drill shed is also a necessity so that in cold and wet weather training can be carried on uninterrupted.

IV. DOCKYARDS

In anticipation of some of the vessels of the Naval Programme being completed in three years, the necessary Dockyard provision must be made for dealing with any repairs which may arise when the ships come into service.

The plant and machinery at Halifax is unsuitable and inadequate to deal with repairs to up-to-date

ships; complete re-organisation is necessary and new shops and machinery are required.

The additions which will be necessary raise the question as to whether the existing dockyard is suitable to meet the future requirements and whether there is room for expansion to deal with a modern fleet.

The suitability of the present site of the Dockyard at Halifax requires, therefore, immediate consideration, and it is not desirable to incur more expense than necessary on the present Dockyard until this question has been considered. The present site leaves no room for expansion and also blocks any expansion in the shape of facilities for mercantile Ships and Railways.

The Admiralty have been approached in this matter and concur in the abandonment of the present Dockyard, provided that similar accommodation is provided elsewhere in Halifax; a suitable situation is available and a report thereon has been made.

In the event of it being decided to remain in present position, a report was drawn up and forwarded to the Deputy Minister in April last giving
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Royal Naval College Halifax

detailed proposals for re-organization of Halifax, the estimated cost of which was approximately, \$1,300,000.

Esquimalt Dockyard with a few additions meets present requirements.

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Document 3

Kingsmill's frustrations with Civil Service administration, 1911

Director of the Naval Service to the Deputy Minister, 4 April 1911, enclosing Director of Naval Gunnery to Director of the Naval Service, 31 March 1911 (Library and Archives Canada, National Personnel Records Centre, file NS 60-S-2)

Editor's note: A striking aspect of Kingsmill's recommendations of October 1911 for the development of the navy, reproduced above, is that he, the professional head of the naval service, passed this professional advice to the minister through the deputy minister, a civil servant. G.J. Desbarats, the deputy minister, had in fact exerted considerable effort to establish himself in this position. Citing his financial responsibilities in the new department, he first won an increment in salary that gave him a higher pay scale than Kingsmill. On that basis he then successfully claimed precedence over the admiral in the organization.

The documents reproduced below give evidence of Kingsmill's irritation at the predominance of a civil servant in a military department. The second document below is a threat of resignation by Lieutenant R.M.T. Stephens, one of three British officers engaged by Kingsmill in 1909 as headquarters staff to assist in the military direction of the service. In reality,

Stephens, as he complains, was employed as a clerk by the deputy minister for routine civil service duties. Kingsmill, in forwarding Stephens's note, not only endorses it but adds that he too is employed by Desbarats for clerical work.

Memo. For Deputy Minister:

In forwarding the accompanying correspondence from Lieutenant Stephens, I would like to add that I think it is very desirable that some definite arrangements should be arrived at as to the duties and position of Mr. Stephens.

Mr. Stephens' duties are, in my opinion, exceedingly important. He has all to do with the Gunnery and Torpedo work of the different vessels, which, although up to the present they have not carried out any very extensiv[e] practice, involved the responsibility of precautions to be taken and regulations to be attended to. In addition to the above, he is the Intelligence Officer of the Department, which entails quite a considerable amount of work.

I must say that I agree with him as to the question raised as to answering Parliamentary questions and making out

returns. Mr. Stephens' duties, as far as the Gunnery and Torpedo work goes, necessitate a great deal of detail work, which it is next door to impossible to satisfactorily look after if he is interrupted from time to time.

In my opinion, the Department is suffering very much through the Deputy Minister not having some one Clerk immediately under him who can attend to all these extraneous matters. As far as my own work goes, I find that looking up files as, for instance, in the case of the B.C. Salvage Company's claim against the Department, and another case cropping up with Mr. Wright, and all such matters might be done by Civil Departmental Official as well as by myself. I think in organizing a Service like this that I requires one's whole attention in considering matters and looking ahead, and not to have one's time so fully occupied writing letters for different persons' signatures, and obtaining information asked for in the Senate and House which is all on file.

April 4, '11

[Signed] C.E. Kingsmill Rear Admiral.

* * * * *

Ottawa 31 March 1911

CONFIDENTIAL

Sir,

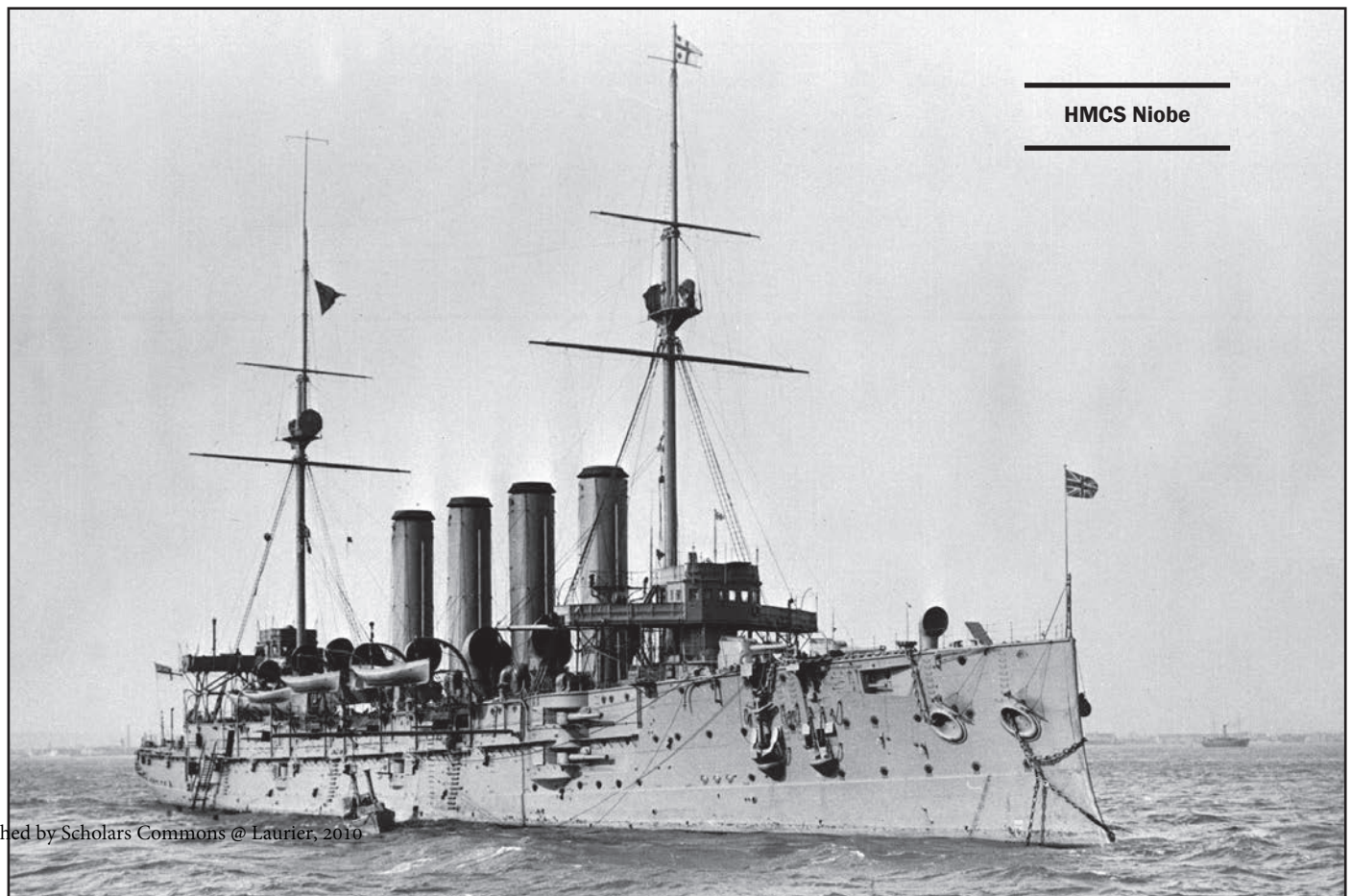
I have the honour to make the following further remarks with reference to the correspondence between the Deputy Minister and myself, submitted to you on the 27th. instant.

It will be seen from the Correspondence that there appears to be some difference of opinion between us as to the position and duties of the D.N.G.

I therefore submit that the Deputy Minister may be requested to express his views as to the position and duties of the D.N.G., in order that I may be free to take any further steps which I may consider necessary,

I am, Sir,
Your Obedient Servant,
R.M. Stephens
Lieutenant R.N.,
Directory of Naval Gunnery

The Director of the Naval Service Canada,
Ottawa.



HMCS Niobe

DND Photo CN-6732